

and remade for the purpose of limiting that supremacy, and checking the evils to which it gave rise. There was too, and long had been, a jealousy of clerical power, as is patent from the attempts to restrict the privileges of the clergy and the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical courts. The heretic had further been perturbing the peace of the Church since the days of Wicklif, in spite of severe statutes against heresy, and the burning of heretic Lollards. These Lollards had continued to subsist and nurture their heresy in secret among the lower classes throughout the fifteenth century, as is evident from the occasional arraignment and burning of some obscure disciple of Wicklif. So late as the opening years of Henry the Eighth's reign a considerable number of these heretics abjured their errors in order to escape the fire, and several who showed themselves obstinate, or relapsed after abjuration, were burned. Fitz-Jarnes, bishop of London, distinguished himself in this heresy hunt, and his zeal was the butt of the wit of Ammonius, Henry's Latin secretary, who jestingly wrote to Erasmus that he did not wonder that wood was so scarce and dear, since the heretics caused so many holocausts. And yet, he added, their numbers grow.

Uncompromising hostility to the Church and its doctrines was, nevertheless, exceptional in England on the eve of the Reformation. Reformers of the school of Colct, More, Erasmus, were staunch Churchmen, though they loudly denounced the degenerate ecclesiastic of the age and ridiculed the monks. Henry himself, whilst sympathising with the humanists and defending Dr Standish, who attacked the immunity of the clergy and exalted the royal supremacy in the Convocation of 1515, wrote an answer to Luther's book on the Babylonian Captivity of the Church, and received from a grateful pope the title of Defender of the Faith. In asserting his prerogative in such matters as the deprivation of murderers and malefactors of the benefit of clergy, he only claimed a right that had been asserted by his ancestors, and was making no new attack on the liberties of the Church. "We arc,⁵³ he told the bishops, "by the suffraanee of God, king of England, and the kings of England in times past never had any superior but God. Know, therefore, that we will maintain the rights of the crown in this matter like our progenitors." Even "The